VIETNAMESE PROTEST MUSIC
Courtney Steggall

NCSS Thematic Strand: Time, Continuity, and Change
National Standard for History: Era 9, Standard 2 (Post War United States; How the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics)

Grade Level: 9-12

Class Time Needed: one 50 minute period

Background, Context, and Purpose
After 1967, the Vietnam War (1955-1975) was often met with fierce public opposition, especially from college students and professional musicians. People became increasingly frustrated as the years of involvement dragged on with no end in sight and no clear and convincing reasons why the United States had intervened at all. College students often protested against the Vietnam War on their college campuses. The most famous instance of an anti war protest—Kent State (May 4, 1970)—ended in disaster when National Guard forces fired into a crowd of protestors killing four students. Professional musicians like Neil Young and Bob Dylan saw what was going on in Vietnam and in the United States and began to record and perform songs in protest of the American presence in Vietnam.

This lesson seeks to highlight the growing protest movement among young people and musicians in the United States against the American involvement in Vietnam. Students will examine various Vietnam protest songs to discover reasons why many Americans were against the Vietnam War. This lesson fits into a unit about the Vietnam War as a way to bring attention to American opposition of the United States’s presence in Vietnam and surrounding countries, and should be implemented after the students have a good understanding of the main events of the war.

Goals/Objectives

Students will:
- Understand How the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics (Era 9, Standard 2);
- Evaluate how Vietnamese and Americans experienced the war and how the war continued to affect postwar politics and culture. (Era 9, Standard 2C);
- Analyze the constitutional issues involved in the war and explore the legacy of the Vietnam War. (Era 9, Standard 2C).

Materials
- Video “Ohio; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young—Kent State Massacre Montage” with lyrics to the song, “Ohio.” (found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gl7m919ynU&feature=related)

Copies of the lyrics for the songs: “God Bless This Mess” by Sheryl Crow and “Let’s Impeach the President” by Neil Young.

Procedures

Procedure 1: 10 minutes
I. Introduction
   A. To situate students to the lesson, begin by reminding them that we are in the middle of the Cold War Unit and are learning about the Vietnam War.
   B. Remind them that yesterday we began discussing domestic opposition to the war by looking at college protests and the Kent State Massacre.
   C. Ask the students if anyone can summarize what happened at Kent State.
      1. If no one volunteers, give a short summary yourself
   D. Tell students that college kids weren’t the only one’s protesting the Vietnam War. At this time, professional musicians (like Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, and Neil Young) began to protest the war, as well.
   E. Let students know that today we are going to look at some Vietnam protest songs to try to see why people were so opposed to the war.
II. Kent State Montage Video
   A. Play “Ohio; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young—Kent State Massacre Montage” for the students to watch.
   B. This video contains the lyrics to the song, “Ohio,” a protest song about the Kent State shootings of 1970. This video provides the chance to do a “practice” analysis of a Vietnam protest song.
   C. After the video plays, put the lyrics to “Ohio” up on the screen. Then ask students some analytic questions:
      - What was the theme of the song, “Ohio”?
      - Do you think this song is effective in conveying the theme?

Procedure 2: 20 minutes
I. Small Group Analysis of a Vietnam Protest Song
   A. Split the class into four groups
   B. Give each group copies of one of the four protest songs “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag” by Joe McDonald, “Ballad Of Penny Evans” by Steve Goodman, “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival, and “Clean-Cut Kid” by Bob Dylan
   C. Put the discussion questions up on the screen.
   D. Have students read their specific song and discuss the questions with their other group members. Let students know that they will be responsible for reporting to the rest of the class about the song they are looking at.
      1. Discussion Questions:
         - What is the overall message(s) of your song?
         - How does this song seem to protest the Vietnam War?
• What is the intended audience of the song?
• What are some lyrics that stood out to you that are effective in conveying the message of the song?

Procedure 3: 15 minutes
I. Large Group Discussion
   A. Bring the small groups back together
   B. Go around to each group and ask them to give the rest of the class a summary of their song, its theme, and any lyrics that stood out to them as exceptionally effective in conveying the theme of the song.
      1. If time allows, play a bit of each group’s song before they summarize it to give them a taste of what it sounds like.
   C. After each group has discussed their song with the rest of the class; ask the students to synthesize some of the major reasons people opposed the Vietnam War.
      1. Some of the reasons they should gather from the songs include:
         • Thought the war was meaningless; young men are dying for no reason;
         • There are no reasons given for American intervention in Vietnam that convince the public;
         • Poor/underprivileged men seem to be the ones sent to fight overseas;
         • Negative effects on the returning soldiers;
         • Negative effects on the family/loved ones left behind.

Procedure 4: 5 minutes
I. Connection to Today/Assignment
   A. Distribute copies of “God Bless This Mess” by Sheryl Crow and “Let’s Impeach the President” by Neil Young—two protest songs about the War in Iraq.
   B. Instruct students to read the lyrics of these two modern protest songs and to answer the questions given for one of the songs.
      1. Questions:
         • What is the overall message of this song?
         • How does this song seem to protest American intervention in Iraq? What are some lyrics that support this?
   C. Students can begin to work on the assignment in class if there is time. Let student’s know that the assignment is due the following day.

Assessment of Outcomes
Students will:
• Analyze Vietnam protest songs to investigate reasons Americans opposed the Vietnam War;
• Analyze modern protest songs and discuss what their themes are and support their opinion with lyrics from the song.
Extensions and Adaptations
Have students find their own Vietnam War protest songs to analyze, instead of giving them specific ones.

Have students watch interviews with musicians who recorded protest songs in the 1960s and 1970s to hear directly why they wrote the songs they did. (A video discussing Vietnam protest songs can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3L6uyxBPFc, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxpDorXrUmY&feature=related, and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbQECHzMhXo&feature=related)

Resources

Video “Ohio; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young—Kent State Massacre Montage” Found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI7-m919ynU&feature=related.

Lyrics to all songs found at: http://www.lyrics.com/

All photos found at google.com/images
“OHIO”
Neil Young (1970)

Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Bombing  
We're Finally an Our Own  
This Summer I Hear the Drumming  
Four Dead in Ohio

Gotta Get Down To It  
Soldiers Are Gunning Us Down  
Should Of Been Done Long Ago  
What If You Knew Her And  
Found Her Dead On The Ground  
How Can You Run When You Know

La La La La La La La
La La La La La La La
La La La La La La La

Tin Soldiers And Nixon's Bombing  
We're Finally On Our Own  
This Summer I Hear The Drumming  
Four Dead In Ohio

Four Dead In Ohio  
Four Dead In Ohio  
Four Dead In Ohio  
Four Dead In Ohio

“I-FEEL-LIKE-I'M-FIXIN'-TO-DIE RAG”
Joe McDonald (1965)

Well, Come On All Of You, Big Strong Men,  
Uncle Sam Needs Your Help Again.  
He's Got Himself In A Terrible Jam  
Way Down Yonder In Vietnam  
So Put Down Your Books And Pick Up A Gun,  
We're Gonna Have A Whole Lotta Fun.

And It's One, Two, Three,  
What Are We Fighting For?  
Don't Ask Me, I Don't Give A Damn,  
Next Stop Is Vietnam;  
And It's Five, Six, Seven,  
Open Up The Pearly Gates,  
Well There Ain't No Time To Wonder Why,  
Whoopie! We're All Gonna Die.
Come On Wall Street, Don't Be Slow,  
Why Man, This Is War Au-Go-Go  
There's Plenty Good Money To Be Made  
By Supplying The Army With The Tools Of Its Trade,  
But Just Hope And Pray That If They Drop The Bomb,  
They Drop It On The Viet Cong.

And It's One, Two, Three,  
What Are We Fighting For?  
Don't Ask Me, I Don't Give A Damn,  
Next Stop Is Vietnam.  
And It's Five, Six, Seven,  
Open Up The Pearly Gates,  
Well There Ain't No Time To Wonder Why  
Whoopee! We're All Gonna Die.

Well, Come On Generals, Let's Move Fast;  
Your Big Chance Has Come At Last.  
Now You Can Go Out And Get Those Reds  
'Cause The Only Good Commie Is The One That's Dead  
And You Know That Peace Can Only Be Won  
When We've Blown 'Em All To Kingdom Come.

And It's One, Two, Three,  
What Are We Fighting For?  
Don't Ask Me, I Don't Give A Damn,  
Next Stop Is Vietnam;  
And It's Five, Six, Seven,  
Open Up The Pearly Gates,  
Well There Ain't No Time To Wonder Why  
Whoopee! We're All Gonna Die.

Come On Mothers Throughout The Land,  
Pack Your Boys Off To Vietnam.  
Come On Fathers, And Don't Hesitate  
To Send Your Sons Off Before It's Too Late.  
And You Can Be The First Ones On Your Block  
To Have Your Boy Come Home In A Box.

And It's One, Two, Three  
What Are We Fighting For?  
Don't Ask Me, I Don't Give A Damn,  
Next Stop Is Vietnam.  
And It's Five, Six, Seven,  
Open Up The Pearly Gates,  
Well There Ain't No Time To Wonder Why  
Whoopee! We're All Gonna Die.
“BALLAD OF PENNY EVANS”
Steve Goodman (1971)

My Name Is Penny Evans And My Age Is Twenty-One
I'm A Widow Of The War That Was Fought In Vietnam
I Have Two Baby Daughters And I Do The Best I Can
They Say The War Is Over But I Think It's Just Begun

I Remember I Was Seventeen When First I Met My Bill
At His Father's Grand Piano We Played Old 'Heart And Soul'
I Only Knew The Left Hand Part, He Knew The Right So Well
He's The Only Boy I Slept With, And The Only One I Will

First We Had A Baby Girl, We Had Two Good Years
And Next The Warning Notice Came, We Parted Without Tears
Then It's Nine Months From Our Last Goodbye Our Second Child Appears
And It's Ten Months And A Telegram Confirming All Our Fears

So Once A Month I Get A Check From Some Army Bureaucrat
And Once A Month I Tear It Up And Mail The Damn Thing Back
Do They Think That Makes It All Right? Do They Think I'll Fall For That
They Can Keep Their Bloody Money, It Won't Bring My Billy Back

I Never Cared For Politics, Speeches I Don't Understand
Likewise I'll Take No Charity From Any Living Man
But Tonight There's Fifty Thousand Gone In That Unhappy Land
And Fifty Thousand 'Heart And Souls' Being Played With Just One Hand

My Name Is Penny Evans And My Age Is Twenty-One
I'm A Widow Of The War That Was Fought In Vietnam
I Have Two Baby Daughters - Thank God I Have No Son
They Say The War Is Over But I Think It's Just Begun

“FORTUNATE SON”
Creedence Clearwater Revival (1969)

Some folks are born made to wave the flag
Ooh, they're red, white, and blue
And when the band plays "Hail to the Chief"
They point the cannon right at you

It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no senator's son
It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no fortunate one

Some folks are born silver spoon in hand,
Lord, don't they help themselves
But when the tax man comes to the door,
Lord the house looks like a rummage sale

It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no millionaire's son
It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no fortunate one

Some folks inherit star spangled eyes,
Ooh, they send you down to war
And when you ask them, "How much should we give?"
They only answer "More! More! More!"

It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no military son
It ain't me, it ain't me
I ain't no fortunate one

"CLEAN-CUT KID"
Bob Dylan

Everybody's asking why he couldn't adjust
Adjust to what, a dream that bust?
They took a clean-cut kid
And they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

They said what's up is down, they said what isn't is
They put ideas in his head that he thought were his.

They took a clean-cut kid
But they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

He was on the baseball team, he was in the marching band
When he was ten years old he had a watermelon stand.

He was a clean-cut kid
And they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

They said, "Listen boy, you're just a pup"
They sent him to a napalm health spa to shape up.
They gave him dope to smoke, drinks and pills
A jeep to drive, blood to spill.

They said "Congratulations, you got what it takes"
They sent him back into the race without any brakes.

They took a clean-cut kid
But they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

He bought the American dream but it put him in doubt
Only game he could play was Russian roulette.
He drank Coca-Cola, he was eating Wonder Bread
He ate Burger Kings, he was well fed.
He went to Hollywood to see Peter O'Toole
He stole a Rolls Royce and drove in a swimming pool.

They took a clean-cut kid
But they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

He could've sold insurance, owned a restaurant or bar
He could've been an accountant or a tennis star.
He was wearing boxing gloves, took a dive one day
Off the Golden Gate Bridge into China Bay.

His mama walks the floor, his daddy weeps and moans
They gotta sleep together in a home they don't own.

They took a clean-cut kid
And they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

Everybody's asking why he didn't adjust
All he ever wanted was somebody to trust.
They took his head and turned it inside out
He never did know what it was all about.

He had a steady job, he joined the choir
He never did plan to walk the high wire.

They took a clean-cut kid
And they made a killer out of him
That's what they did.

"GOD BLESS THIS MESS"
Sheryl Crow (2008)

Daddy's in the hallway
Hanging pictures on the wall
Mama's in the kitchen
Making casseroles for all
My brother came home yesterday
From somewhere far away
He doesn't look like I remember
He just stares off into space
He must've seen some ugly things
He just can't seem to say

God bless this mess
God bless this mess

Got a job in town
Selling insurance on the phone
With Robert and Teresa
And two con men from back home
Everyone I call up doesn't have the time to chat
Everybody is so busy doing this and doing that
Something has gone missing

And it makes me kinda sad, oh

God bless this mess
God bless this mess
God bless this mess

Heard about the day
that two skyscrapers came down
Firemen, policemen
And people came from all around
The smoke covered the city
And the body count arise
The president spoke words of comfort
With tears in his eyes
Then he led us as a nation
Into a war all based on lies, oh

God bless this mess
God bless this mess
God bless this mess
God bless this mess

"LET'S IMPEACH THE PRESIDENT"
Neil Young (2006)

Let's impeach the President for lying
And misleading our country into war
Abusing all the power that we gave him
And shipping all our money out the door

Who's the man who hired all the criminals
The White House shadows who hide behind closed doors
They bend the facts to fit with their new stories
Of why we have to send our men to war

Let's impeach the President for spying
On citizens inside their own homes
Breaking every law in the country
By tapping our computers and telephones

What if Al Qaeda blew up the levees
Would New Orleans have been safer that way
Sheltered by our government's protection
Or was someone just not home that day?

Flip - Flop
Flip - Flop
Flip - Flop
Flip - Flop

Let's impeach the president for hijacking
   Our religion and using it to get elected
       Dividing our country into colors
   And still leaving black people neglected

Thank god he's cracking down on steroids
   Since he sold his old baseball team
There's lots of people looking at big trouble
   But of course our president is clean.

Thank God